

# Cross-cultural exploration of stylized performance: traditional Chinese training methods in drama education

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the effectiveness of stylized performance training in cross-cultural drama education, focusing on how symbolic body language conveys emotions and character intent. Originating from traditional Chinese theatre, stylized training was adapted to help students from diverse cultural backgrounds achieve emotional resonance and cohesive character portrayal. Employing a participatory action research (PAR) design, the 16-week experiment involved performing arts students from six cultures, using iterative feedback and reflective practices to track changes in emotional expression and adaptation to symbolic movements. The training included three phases: basic training, emotional integration, and applied practice. Data was collected through classroom observations, interviews, feedback forms, and peer evaluations. Findings show that participants improved in non-verbal emotional expression, effectively conveying emotions across cultural barriers. Supported by Pavis's "intercultural theatre" theory and Mead's symbolic interactionism, the study highlights stylized performance's potential to enhance cross-cultural emotional resonance in drama education.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Drama, with its distinctive expressive form, serves as a vital bridge for cross-cultural dialogue in contemporary society. As an artistic medium capable of transcending linguistic and cultural barriers, theatre not only connects performers from diverse cultural backgrounds but also engages multicultural audiences, becoming a universally shared artistic experience. Consequently, the innovative nature of theatrical performance continues to expand, incorporating cultural elements from various countries and blending with diverse forms of artistic expression, thereby setting higher standards for theatrical practice [1]. In response to the demands of this cross-cultural performance environment, theatre education faces new challenges and opportunities: how to craft universally resonant character representations while respecting the distinct cultural characteristics of each tradition [2]. This challenge drives the theatre education environment toward greater diversity, attracting students from various cultural backgrounds and transforming the classroom into a platform for multicultural exchange [3].

However, as students from diverse cultural backgrounds enter the same performance classroom, the challenges of cross-cultural exchange gradually become apparent. Significant differences in language, emotional expression habits, and cultural understanding among students can easily create barriers to comprehension and expression in performance interactions [4]–[6]. As French theatre scholar, Mihuş [7] suggests in his theory of intercultural theatre, cultural differences not only pose communication challenges

but also complicate how actors balance the specific traits of their original cultures with the broader demands of performance in a multicultural context. Gilbert and Lo [8] further indicate that cross-cultural performance practice involves more than merely integrating foreign cultures into local theatre. It requires performers to engage in dynamic negotiation between the “self” and the “other” to achieve understanding and expression within a cross-cultural context. This negotiation extends beyond imitation, encompassing respect for and reconstruction of different cultural symbolic systems [9]. Therefore, in intercultural theatre education, addressing the challenge of achieving resonance in cross-cultural performance makes it particularly crucial to develop training methods that enable students from diverse cultural backgrounds to participate collaboratively. Performers must keenly perceive each other’s emotional shifts and movement rhythms, achieving silent mutual responsiveness on stage to collectively convey the play’s emotions and character dynamics. However, cultural differences often hinder students from achieving such synchrony, thereby affecting the overall fluidity and expressiveness of the performance [10]. The need for resonance in intercultural theatre education has become a critical issue, underscoring the necessity of cross-cultural training [11]. Helping students overcome cultural barriers to achieve mutual understanding and collaboration in emotional expression and physical performance lies at the core of this research.

To address this challenge, this study proposes the use of stylized performance training, employing highly symbolic and systematized body language to convey emotions and character intentions as an effective communication method in intercultural theatre education. This training approach draws inspiration from the symbolic system of traditional Chinese theatre but is redesigned in this context to help students achieve emotional resonance and character synchronization in a cross-cultural environment. Therefore, the core research questions of this study are:

- What strategies can performers use to overcome cultural differences and achieve emotional resonance and movement coordination?
- How can a multicultural theatre curriculum be designed through stylized performance training to enhance students’ cultural adaptability and performance skills?
- How can stylized performance training effectively enhance students’ performance coordination and cultural adaptability in intercultural theatre education?

This study aims to explore how these traditional Chinese training techniques can be adapted to improve cultural adaptability, emotional expression, and performance coordination in intercultural theatre education. Ultimately, it seeks to foster a more inclusive and effective approach to drama education that transcends cultural differences. The novelty of this study lies in the innovative application of traditional Chinese theatre training techniques to modern cross-cultural drama education practices.

Building upon the research objectives, this study innovatively applies and contextualizes stylized performance techniques from traditional Chinese theatre to contemporary intercultural theatre education. Using a participatory action research (PAR) methodology and a structured, phased training model, it significantly enhances students’ emotional expression and performance coordination in cross-cultural settings. Moreover, the study offers a practical framework and strategic insights for developing drama curricula tailored to multicultural learning environments.

## 2. THE COMPREHENSIVE THEORETICAL BASIS

### 2.1. The pedagogical impetus driving the exploration of stylized performance training

In cross-cultural theatre education, the challenges posed by cultural differences are becoming increasingly apparent [12]. For example, while Chinese students typically demonstrate ease and finesse when performing works drawn from their own cultural heritage [13], they often struggle to accurately convey the internal emotional dimensions of characters in Western theatrical pieces due to unfamiliar cultural contexts [14]. This cultural gap is especially apparent in performances that require profound emotional depth and nuanced character interpretation. Students encounter difficulties in conveying authentic emotions, reducing the overall naturalness and fluency of their work. The root of this issue does not lie in inadequate acting technique, but rather in cultural barriers that hinder their understanding of characters’ internal worlds [15]. When interpreting Western theatrical roles, students often appear constrained and uneasy, and their emotional expression lacks spontaneity. Faced with diverse cultural body language, they tend to mimic external forms without comprehending the underlying cultural significance. Student feedback further validates this phenomenon. Many reports insufficient emotional resonance or a stiff performance style [16]. They also confess to feeling anxiety regarding foreign cultural topics, stemming from limited cultural comprehension and diminished self-assurance. Over time, students gravitate toward roles that are already familiar to them. Consequently, they deliberately avoid characters characterized by distinct foreign cultural elements.

In multicultural learning environments, students from diverse cultural backgrounds frequently confront significant obstacles in performance and collaboration [17], particularly concerning emotional

expression and physical movement. Moreover, with respect to bodily coordination, students from varied cultural contexts may interpret and accept identical movements differently; certain gestures may be misconstrued or appear unnatural due to cultural discrepancies [18]. Thus, communication barriers in cross-cultural performance transcend linguistic dimensions and encompass deeper levels of emotional and kinetic comprehension.

To help students overcome cultural barriers and strengthen their emotional expression and character formation skills [19], cross-cultural drama education urgently requires the exploration of effective teaching strategies and training methods [20]. Currently, solutions primarily focus on language instruction and cultural exchange activities [21]. While language training assists students in surmounting linguistic obstacles induced by cultural differences, they continue to face difficulties in emotional expression and cultural comprehension. Although cultural exchange activities, such as cross-cultural workshops or improvisational sessions, encourage an understanding of various cultures, they lack the practical guidance needed to achieve emotional resonance and coordinated movement in performance [22]. In a multicultural environment, it becomes essential to explore effective teaching strategies and training methods that foster cross-cultural understanding and establish deeper emotional resonance in performance [23].

Under these circumstances, stylized performance training offers a more effective method for addressing such challenges. Originating from a technique found in traditional Chinese opera, the term *Cheng Shi* originally signifies rules and formats, aiming to establish standards and frameworks for stage performances. *Xunzi's Zhishi* once described it as *Cheng zhe, Wu zhi zhun ye*, underscoring the concept of rules as benchmarks in performance [24]. In traditional Chinese opera, stylized performance is highly codified and symbolic, forming a distinct mode of expression [25]. Building on this principle, the stylized performance training in this study encourages students to employ refined, highly structured body movements to convey emotions and cultural information in cross-cultural performance contexts. Such training focuses on fixed postures, steps, gestures, eye movements, and facial expressions, enabling students to form a unique symbolic system. Each movement holds specific symbolic significance, allowing students to communicate emotions, identity, or character intentions clearly and thus transcend linguistic constraints [26].

## 2.2. Theoretical foundations of stylized performance training in cross-cultural contexts

In cross-cultural theater education, performers from diverse cultural backgrounds often encounter significant disparities in emotional expression and the interpretation of physical gestures [27]. These differences render communication and collaboration critical hurdles [28]. Pavis's theory of intercultural theater provides a valuable framework in this regard [29]. He asserts that intercultural theater is not merely the piecing together of various cultural elements, but rather a dynamic cultural dialogue in which performers achieve the coexistence of different cultural symbols and expressive forms through "negotiation" [30]. During this process, distinct cultural symbols interact while maintaining their autonomy, enabling performers to attain emotional resonance in a multicultural theatrical environment. For stylized performance training, this negotiation process is particularly crucial, as it relies on highly symbolic physical language. This approach assists performers in transcending linguistic barriers and conveying emotions directly.

According to Akanle and Sunday [31], George Herbert Mead's symbolic interactionism further substantiates this perspective. Mead contends that human behavior is mediated through symbols, encompassing not only language but also non-verbal forms such as body movements and emotional expressions [32]. In stylized performance training, actions and postures function as symbolic signs that facilitate communication within cross-cultural contexts. Through repetitive practice, performers can more naturally convey universal emotions. Symbolic interactionism underscores the significance of non-verbal symbols in cultural communication, thereby supporting how stylized performance training achieves emotional transmission through symbolized actions [33]. Specifically, the negotiation inherent in stylized performance training involves the selection and recreation of action symbols [34]. For instance, each movement or posture within the training typically embodies specific emotional or cultural connotations. Performers adjust these actions in response to cross-cultural performance demands to prevent misunderstandings or the oversimplification of the original culture. During this process, students initially learn and comprehend the cultural significance of each action. Subsequently, through continuous practice and refinement, they adapt these movements to suit cross-cultural contexts [35]. This process of transformation and adaptation itself represents a form of cross-cultural negotiation.

Furthermore, Gilbert and Lo's concept of the ethics of hybridity [8] further supports the cross-cultural application of stylized performance training. They argue that the crux of cross-cultural performance lies in balancing the relationship between the self and the other, which involves not only technical adaptation but also sensitivity to and respect for cultural symbols [36]. In stylized performance training, this ethics of hybridity is manifested through the flexible application of symbolized actions [37]. Performers learn and understand the cultural significance of each symbolic movement, not by mere replication, but by adjusting

the angle, intensity, and rhythm of these actions to meet multicultural demands. This ensures that the emotional essence of the symbols is preserved while making them comprehensible to cross-cultural audiences. This process guarantees that symbolic actions honor their original cultural contexts and maintain universal applicability, thereby avoiding the oversimplification or misinterpretation of cultural symbols [38].

Through Pavis's theory of negotiating differences, Mead's symbolic interactionism, and Gilbert and Lo's ethics of hybridity [8], the cross-cultural applicability of stylized performance training is effectively demonstrated. The symbolic systems employed in stylized training provide practical methodologies for cross-cultural negotiation, enabling students to achieve a balance in emotional expression and physical movement [39]. Ultimately, this facilitates natural communication and collaboration on multicultural stages.

### 2.3. Cross-cultural application value of stylized performance training

Stylized performance training transmits emotions and cultural nuances through symbolized actions, thereby holding significant application value in cross-cultural education [40]. In diverse cultural contexts, students can leverage these symbolic gestures to overcome language barriers, facilitating emotional exchanges with both audiences and peers. This training method not only addresses communication obstacles arising from linguistic and cultural differences but also can offer a universal mode of emotional expression, enabling students to convey and comprehend emotions more naturally within multicultural environments [41].

Emphasizing symbolism and systematization, stylized performance training enables students to master a set of universal emotional symbols [42]. By acquiring and refining symbolized postures, movements, gestures, eye expressions, and facial expressions, students transform these elements into effective tools for communication, thereby promoting emotional and cultural exchange in cross-cultural settings. Symbolic interactionism theory supports this training approach, illustrating that these designed action symbols can function as bridges for emotional and cultural information, effectively applicable across diverse cultural backgrounds [43]. This methodology assists students in transcending language barriers, achieving cultural understanding and communication through performance, and thereby providing substantial value to cross-cultural interactions [44].

Specifically, stylized performance training references parts of Chinese opera training, including emotional symbolism exercises, physical expression, and cultural understanding [45]. For example, learning the precise footwork, gestures, and movements of Chinese opera aims at direct emotional communication through body language, and physical expression of role relationships, allowing students to enhance emotional understanding through body language interactions between different roles in collaborative performances, and enhancing students' ability to achieve coordinated movement and unified emotional expression in a multicultural environment [46]. In addition, applying symbolism in improvisation scenarios allows students to convey emotions and character intentions through movement alone without relying on words [47]. This enhances their flexibility, creativity, and self-confidence. This training not only enhances students' performance skills but also provides a common linguistic framework to bridge cultural differences, thus improving the harmony and fluency of cross-cultural cooperation [48].

## 3. METHOD

### 3.1. Research design

To achieve this objective, a PAR methodology is adopted [49], emphasizing collaboration between the researcher and participants through a dynamic feedback mechanism to adjust training content. This methodology was chosen because it facilitates iterative cycles of reflection and adaptation, ensuring that the training is continually refined to meet the specific needs and contextual challenges faced by the participants. By actively involving the participants in every stage of the research, the approach not only empowers them and enhances their engagement but also yields insights that are deeply rooted in real-world experiences. This collaborative process makes it possible to identify and address emerging issues promptly, thereby increasing the overall relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability of the training program. The study spans one academic semester and is divided into three phases: foundational training, emotional and movement integration, and comprehensive application.

Initially, the researcher identifies the challenges students face in emotional expression and cultural understanding during cross-cultural performances through interviews and pre-training observations. Data is then continuously gathered through classroom observations, periodic interviews, and training logs to monitor students' learning trajectories. Feedback is synthesized during the reflection phase to modify the curriculum content and address specific challenges, such as designing targeted exercises for students struggling with certain movements. The training plan is flexibly optimized during the action planning stage to ensure alignment with students' needs and course objectives.

The study involved six performing arts students from the University of North Carolina, the National University of Korea, and Shenyang Urban University. These participants all possessed foundational acting

skills and a shared need for cross-cultural drama training. Their diverse cultural backgrounds validate the universal applicability of the training method. Data collection and analysis employ qualitative methods, including classroom observations, periodic interviews, written feedback, and training logs. Thematic analysis and coding are used to extract students' progress and challenges in dimensions such as emotional expression, bodily movement coordination, and cultural symbol comprehension. To enhance the clarity of findings, the analysis incorporates the quantification of qualitative data, presented through visual tools such as bar charts and line graphs to illustrate students' progress and key outcomes. This approach highlights the practical effects of stylized performance training in cross-cultural performances and its unique value in enhancing students' cultural adaptability and acting skills.

### 3.2. Experimental procedure

The experiment utilized stylized performance training to help students from diverse cultural backgrounds achieve precise emotional expression in cross-cultural drama performances. It was guided by a PAR approach and comprised foundational exercises, emotional integration, and comprehensive application phases. Ongoing feedback informed adjustments throughout the training. The preparation phase involved interviews to understand students' cultural backgrounds, acting styles, and individual needs, enabling the design of a tailored curriculum that emphasized consistency in emotional and physical expressions. Initial training focused on basic emotional symbolization, teaching symbolized actions for primary emotions like joy, anger, sorrow, and happiness. Students practiced coordinating facial expressions with body movements, gradually integrating these into fluid and coherent emotional performances. As training progressed, culturally specific movements from Chinese opera and Japanese Noh theatre were introduced to enhance the depth of expression. Students practiced conveying emotions in various contexts, combining cultural understanding with technical precision. Personalized guidance and group discussions supported the development of flexibility and adaptability in emotional expression. In the final stage, students incorporated stylized actions into dramatic rehearsals, refining their performances through improvisational exercises and integrated rehearsals. Figure 1 shows that the training culminated in a public showcase and feedback discussions, demonstrating the effectiveness of the methods.

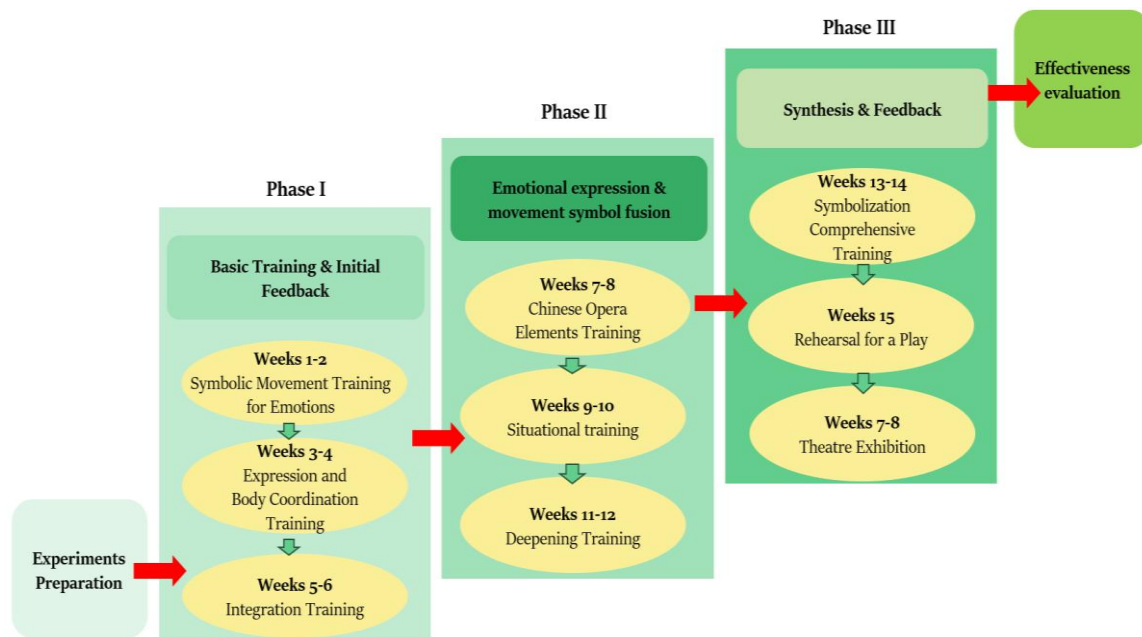


Figure 1. Experimental procedure

### 3.3. Data collection

This study employs PAR combined with qualitative visualization strategies for data collection. It utilizes classroom observations, periodic interviews, written feedback, and video analysis to establish a dynamic feedback mechanism. This mechanism continuously adjusts and optimizes the experimental design based on students' performance and feedback.

### 3.3.1. Participant feedback forms

To systematically record students' learning experiences and performance changes during cross-cultural stylized acting training, standardized feedback forms were distributed at three key stages of the course. Namely, the foundational training phase (weeks 1–6), the emotional and movement integration phase (weeks 7–12), and the comprehensive application phase (weeks 13–16). These forms combined self-assessment scales with open-ended reflection questions, dynamically capturing students' subjective experiences and performance feedback, ensuring data completeness and diversity.

Researchers documented students' performance in emotional expression, movement coordination, cultural symbol understanding, and acting confidence based on the feedback forms, assessing their adaptation and growth throughout the course. The distribution and collection of feedback forms adhered strictly to standardized procedures to ensure data integrity and reliability at each stage. After the course, researchers implemented dynamic adjustments based on the collected feedback, such as adding cultural background explanations and detailed movement exercises to address challenges in understanding cultural movements. This action-reflection-adjustment cycle in the PAR feedback mechanism can meet the data recording needs of this study and enhance the study students' self-reflection and continuous learning.

### 3.3.2. Classroom observation records

To systematically track changes in students' performance during cross-cultural stylized acting training, the researcher conducted classroom observations at three key stages of the course. These observations focused on emotional expression, movement coordination, and cultural adaptation. Data was collected using performance score sheets and detailed classroom notes to ensure completeness and authenticity.

Classroom observations were centered on three main dimensions. The naturalness of emotional expression assessed students' ability to coordinate and express emotions through synchronized facial expressions and bodily movements. The fluency of movement execution monitored changes in the continuity of movements, rhythm control, and the performance of complex actions. Character development and cultural adaptation evaluated students' understanding of multicultural role nuances and their ability to adapt symbolized actions to different cultural contexts. Furthermore, the researcher incorporated peer evaluation feedback to provide multiple perspectives, enhancing the depth and breadth of data collection. These observation records were essential for dynamically adjusting the curriculum, ensuring a systematic and transparent data collection process in line with the core principles of PAR.

### 3.3.3. Stage-based interviews

At the end of each key stage, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews to gain an in-depth understanding of students' learning experiences and adaptation processes. These interviews explored students' experiences, challenges in using cultural symbols, and suggestions for course improvements. The insights gathered aided the researcher in assessing students' adaptation and growth in a cross-cultural environment.

Through sharing difficulties in executing movements and expressing cultural symbols, students reflected on their processes of cultural adaptation and performance adjustments in cross-cultural acting. Additionally, they provided suggestions for improving course content, offering direct references for the dynamic adjustment of the curriculum. The interview data were collected following standardized procedures, utilizing in-depth conversations and reflective questioning to enhance students' active participation in the PAR and their practical contributions to course optimization.

### 3.3.4. Peer evaluation feedback forms

During the three key stages of the course, the researcher collected peer evaluation feedback forms to document students' multidimensional performances and peer assessments in cross-cultural acting. Through mutual observation and feedback, students enhance their self-reflection and improvement awareness, providing the researcher with diverse perspectives on classroom performance. The feedback forms focused on evaluating the fluency of emotional expression, the accuracy of movement execution, understanding and application of cultural symbols, and self-inspiration and creative performance. Based on standardized assessment records, the researcher implemented dynamic curriculum adjustments, particularly reinforcing training on challenges related to emotional expression and cultural adaptation.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study conducted a comprehensive analysis of six students' learning performance and adaptation processes within cross-cultural stylized acting training by collecting data across four dimensions: participant feedback forms, classroom observation records, stage-based interviews, and peer evaluation feedback. The data analysis employed qualitative methodologies, complemented by quantitative processing. Specifically, qualitative data were systematically organized through thematic categorization and coding, and subsequently

converted into quantifiable scores. Progress in emotional expression, movement coordination, cultural symbol comprehension, and performance adaptability across different phases (preliminary, intermediate, and comprehensive application) was illustrated through percentage calculations.

In terms of quantitative processing, each dimension—namely, emotional expression, movement fluency, and cultural adaptability—was assigned specific scoring criteria. Emotional expression was evaluated on a scale ranging from unnatural (0%) to fluent expression (100%). Movement fluency from incoherent execution (0%) to seamless performance (100%), and cultural adaptability from a lack of understanding of cultural symbols (0%) to proficient utilization of cultural symbols (100%). At each phase, students' performance in each dimension was assessed, with the progress percentage calculated using (1):

$$\text{Progress Percentage} = \left( \frac{\text{Final Phase Score} - \text{Initial Phase Score}}{\text{Initial Phase Score}} \right) \times 100\% \quad (1)$$

Here, final phase score refers to the score of the dimension in the final phase (comprehensive application phase); initial phase score refers to the score of the dimension in the initial phase (preliminary training phase). These percentage changes quantify the observed advancements. The resulting quantitative data offers a clear, visual representation of the qualitative analysis. This visualization facilitates the elucidation of students' growth trajectories in cross-cultural stylized acting training.

#### 4.1. Participant feedback analysis

This study collected data from six students through participant feedback forms to examine their learning performance and adaptation processes within cross-cultural stylized acting training. In the domain of emotional expression, students initially exhibited unnatural emotional portrayals during the preliminary phase (weeks 1-6), with an average emotional expression score of 11%. As the course progressed into the emotional integration phase (weeks 7-12), the introduction of slow-motion and mirroring exercises facilitated improvements in emotional expression, elevating the score to 20.83%. By the comprehensive application phase (weeks 13-16), students demonstrated the ability to convey complex emotions with greater ease, further increasing the emotional expression score to 55%.

Regarding movement fluency, early-stage feedback (weeks 1-6) indicated significant deficiencies in movement decomposition and rhythm control, resulting in a movement fluency score of 4.25%. With the incorporation of emotional and movement integration exercises during the mid-phase (weeks 7-12), students showed marked enhancements in movement coordination, raising the score to 12.65%. In the comprehensive application phase (weeks 13-16), movement fluency continued to improve substantially, reaching 50%.

In the area of cultural adaptability, initial assessments (weeks 1-6) revealed that students had a limited understanding and application of cultural symbols, reflected in a score of 5%. As the curriculum incorporated cultural background explanations and role simulation exercises, students' cultural adaptability progressively increased, with mid-phase scores rising to 18.75%. By the comprehensive application phase (weeks 13-16), students were able to adeptly utilize cultural symbols, elevating the cultural adaptability score to 45.87%.

Qualitative analysis of the participant feedback forms demonstrated significant advancements across all measured dimensions. Emotional expression naturalness improved from an initial score of 11 to 55%, representing a 44% increase. Movement fluency advanced from 4.25 to 50%, marking a 45.75% improvement. Cultural adaptability grew from 5 to 45.87%, indicating a 40.87% enhancement. These findings substantiate that stylized performance training significantly enhances students' acting abilities and cultural adaptability within cross-cultural drama education, particularly in the areas of emotional expression, movement fluency, and cultural symbol utilization.

Overall, participants achieved notable progress in emotional expression and adaptability of symbolized movements, underscoring the strong applicability of stylized performance training in cross-cultural education. The study further validates symbolic actions as an effective bridge for cross-cultural communication, particularly in overcoming language barriers. Figure 2 shows that participants were able to effectively convey emotions and achieve emotional resonance across diverse cultural contexts.

#### 4.2. Classroom observation records analysis

This study analyzed the classroom observation records of six students, focusing on their performance in emotional expression, movement fluency, and cultural adaptability, thereby highlighting their progress in cross-cultural stylized acting training. In emotional expression, students initially (weeks 1-6) exhibited unnatural expressions, scoring 2%. During the intermediate phase (weeks 7-12), slow-motion and mirroring exercises improved their emotional expression to 14.35%. By the comprehensive application phase (weeks 13-16), most students could fluently express emotions, with scores rising to 44.75%. Regarding movement fluency, initial scores (weeks 1-6) were 5.25%, indicating weak coordination. With continued

training, movement fluency increased to 20% in the intermediate phase and reached 46.36% in the comprehensive application phase, enabling most students to execute complex movements smoothly. In cultural adaptability, students initially (weeks 1-6) had a limited understanding of cultural symbols, scoring 2.5%. This improved to 16.75% in the intermediate phase and to 33.3% in the comprehensive application phase, allowing students to flexibly utilize cultural symbols.

Qualitative analysis of the feedback forms revealed significant advancements in three key areas. Emotional expression naturalness increased from 2 to 44.75% (a 42.75% improvement), movement fluency from 5.25 to 46.36% (a 41.11% improvement), and cultural adaptability from 2.5 to 33.3% (a 30.3% improvement). Figure 3 shows that these results indicate that stylized performance training significantly enhances students' cross-cultural acting abilities.

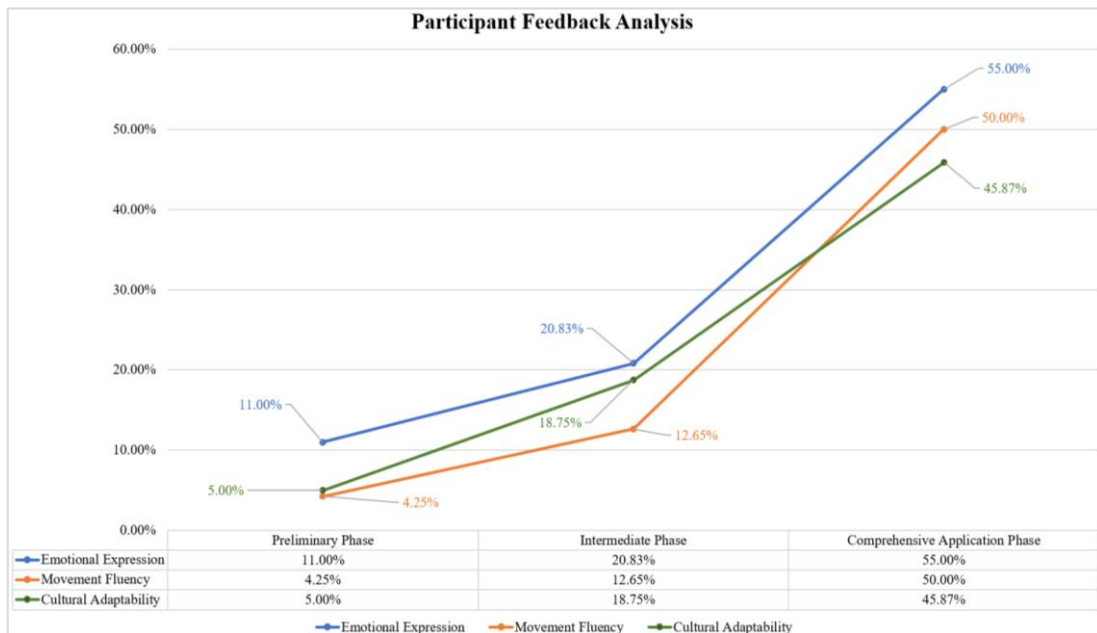


Figure 2. Participant feedback analysis line graph

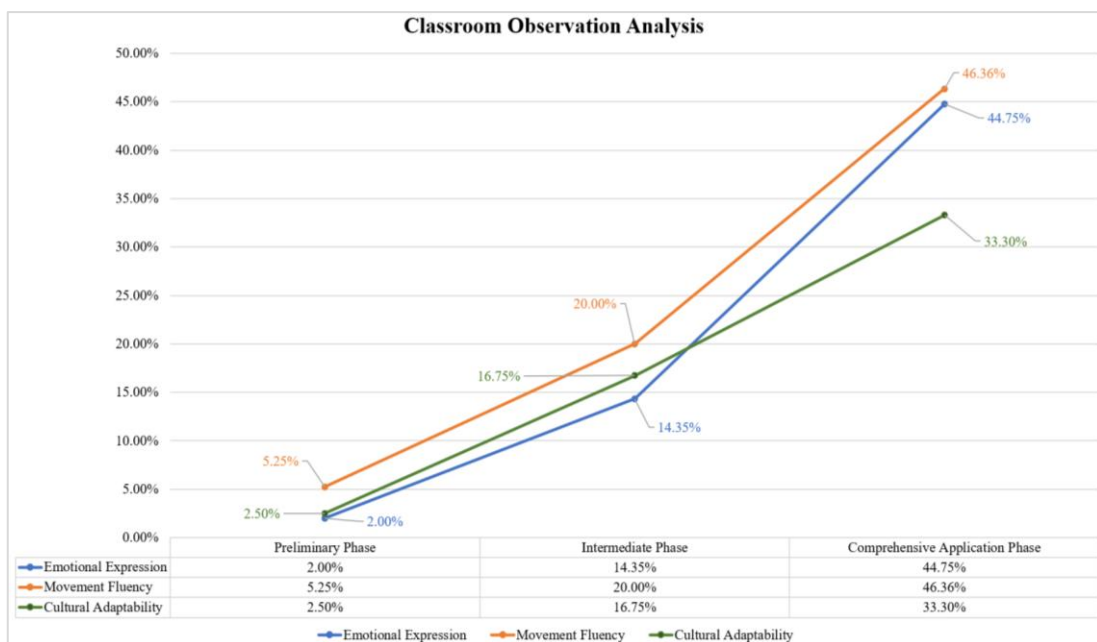


Figure 3. Classroom observation records analysis line graph



### 4.3. Stage-based interview analysis

Through stage-based interviews, this study examined the progress of six students in cross-cultural stylized acting training. Combining qualitative analysis with quantitative methods, the research highlighted changes in emotional expression, movement fluency, and cultural adaptability. In emotional expression, students initially (weeks 1-6) displayed unnatural expressions, scoring 10%. During the emotional integration phase (weeks 7-12), slow-motion and mirroring exercises improved their emotional expression to 20.83%. By the comprehensive application phase (weeks 13-16), students could fluently convey complex emotions, with scores rising to 53.33%. Regarding movement fluency, initial scores (weeks 1-6) were 6.25%, indicating significant coordination challenges. Mid-phase training (weeks 7-12) increased movement fluency to 17.65%, and the comprehensive phase (weeks 13-16) further enhanced it to 49.32%, enabling smooth execution of complex movements. In cultural adaptability, students began with a weak understanding of cultural symbols (weeks 1-6, score 5%). With the introduction of cultural explanations and role simulations during the mid-phase (weeks 7-12), scores improved to 18.75%. By the comprehensive application phase (weeks 13-16), cultural adaptability reached 42.87%, demonstrating the ability to flexibly utilize cultural symbols.

Qualitative analysis revealed significant advancements in all measured dimensions. Emotional expression improved by 43.33% (from 10% to 53.33%), movement fluency by 43.07% (from 6.25% to 49.32%), and cultural adaptability by 37.87% (from 5% to 42.87%). Figure 4 shows that these findings confirm that stylized performance training effectively enhances students' cross-cultural acting abilities.

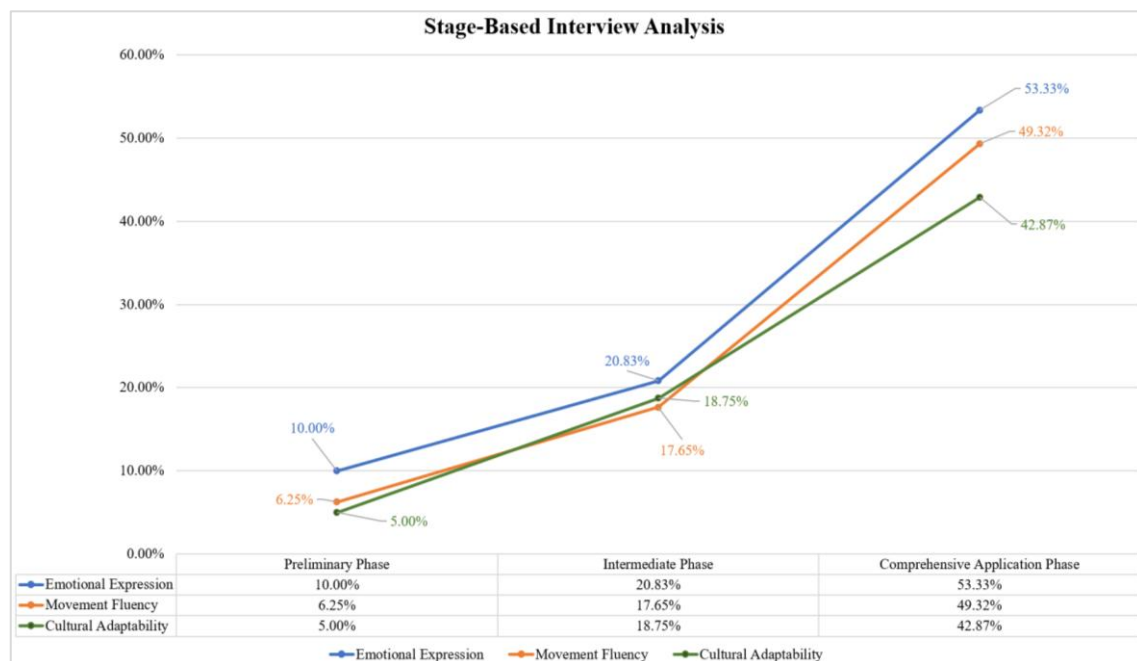


Figure 4. Stage-based interview analysis line graph

### 4.4. Peer evaluation feedback analysis

This study analyzed peer evaluation feedback from six students participating in cross-cultural stylized acting training, focusing on their progress in emotional expression, movement fluency, and cultural adaptability. In emotional expression, students initially (weeks 1-6) exhibited restrained expressions, characterized by “lack of emotional depth” or “inadequate emotional conveyance,” with peer evaluation scores averaging 15%. Through emotional integration exercises, particularly the introduction of slow-motion and mirroring practices, students' emotional expression became more natural, increasing peer evaluation scores to 25.83% during the intermediate phase (weeks 7-12). By the comprehensive application phase (weeks 13-16), students were able to fluently express complex emotions, with peer evaluation scores further rising to 59.33%. Regarding movement fluency, initial phase (weeks 1-6) feedback indicated significant coordination issues, with students' actions described as “stiff” or “lacking fluidity,” resulting in a movement fluency score of 5.56%. Through the integration of emotional and movement exercises, movement coordination significantly improved during the intermediate phase (weeks 7-12), with scores increasing to

17.65%. In the comprehensive application phase (weeks 13-16), movement fluency was further enhanced to 52.26%, with over 85% of students capable of smoothly executing complex action sequences. In the area of cultural adaptability, students initially (weeks 1-6) demonstrated low confidence in understanding and utilizing cultural symbols, scoring 3%. With the introduction of cultural background explanations and role simulation exercises, students gradually improved their cultural adaptability, achieving a score of 22.75% during the intermediate phase. By the comprehensive application phase (weeks 13-16), students could flexibly employ cultural symbols, with scores rising to 42.87%.

Qualitative analysis of peer evaluation feedback revealed significant advancements in all measured dimensions. Emotional expression naturalness increased from 15 to 59.33% (a 44.33% improvement), movement fluency rose from 5.56 to 52.26% (a 46.7% improvement), and cultural adaptability grew from 3 to 42.87% (a 37.87% improvement). Figure 5 shows that these data demonstrate that stylized performance training substantially enhances students' cross-cultural acting capabilities, particularly in emotional expression, movement coordination, and cultural adaptability.

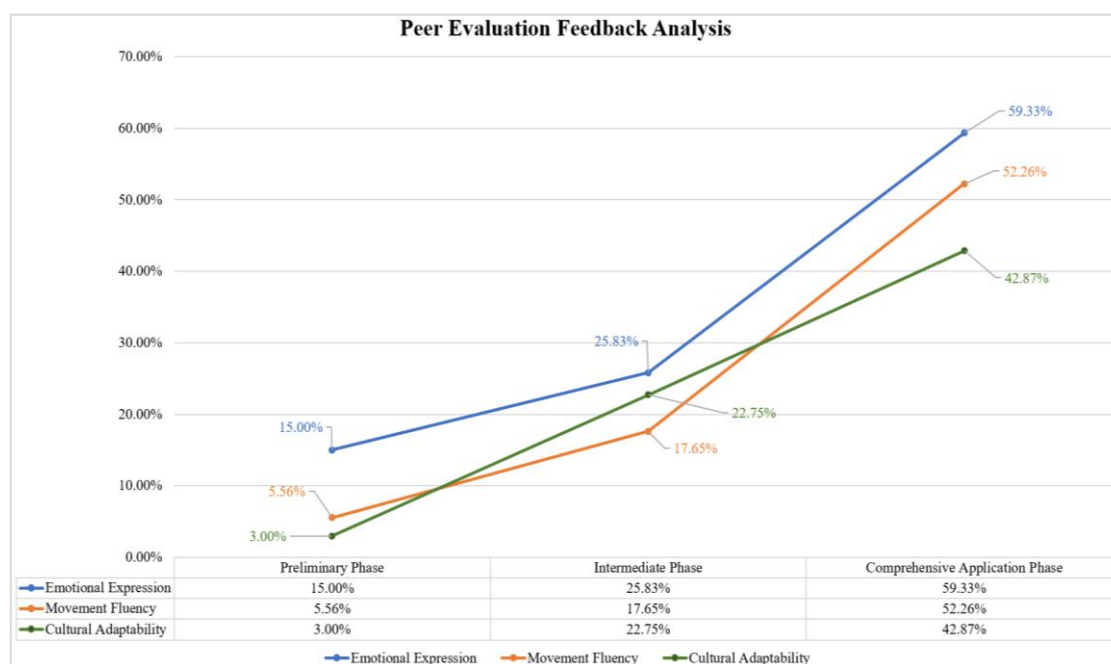


Figure 5. Peer evaluation feedback analysis line graph

#### 4.5. Discussion

This study highlights the multifaceted effectiveness of stylized performance training in cross-cultural drama education. It aligned with Patrice Pavis's theory of intercultural theatre, which emphasizes the dynamic negotiation of cultural symbols [29]. Students demonstrated significant progress in emotional expression, movement coordination, and the understanding and application of cultural symbols, reflecting the program's potential to foster comprehensive growth in performance skills and cultural awareness [36].

In terms of emotional expression, students gradually overcame the limitations imposed by cultural backgrounds, enabling them to convey emotions more naturally through stylized actions. By practicing fixed movements symbolizing emotions such as "anger" and "sadness," they began to deliver more authentic and profound emotional performances. This outcome echoes the '*Cheng Shi*' principle of codified performance in traditional Chinese theatre, which establishes symbolic actions as consistent benchmarks for emotional communication across diverse contexts [41]. This transformation was particularly evident in scenes requiring complex emotional expressions, where students achieved greater fluency and emotional resonance in cross-cultural contexts. These findings underscore the role of symbolic actions in transcending linguistic barriers and offering students an alternative pathway to express their emotions.

At the same time, students made notable strides in movement coordination. Through training in the stylized movements of Chinese opera and the deliberate footwork of Japanese Noh theatre, they developed improved control over rhythm, force, and body dynamics [42]. These structured exercises not only enhanced their technical proficiency but also equipped them with the adaptability needed for diverse cultural settings.

This progress substantiates Patrice Pavis's concept of "intercultural negotiation," demonstrating how performers must dynamically adjust symbolic systems to bridge cultural divides. By practicing and fine-tuning movement details, students learned to adjust their actions dynamically to meet the demands of cross-cultural performances, achieving a seamless integration of movement and emotion. This progress validates Pavis's theory of "intercultural negotiation," demonstrating how students can balance cultural distinctiveness with adaptability in their physical expressions [24].

Moreover, students significantly advanced their ability to understand and apply cultural symbols. They moved beyond rote imitation to deeply engage with the cultural meanings embedded in symbolic actions, incorporating these insights into their performances. Building on George Herbert Mead's symbolic interactionism, which highlights non-verbal symbols as mediators in cultural communication, participants deepened their comprehension of each action's symbolic significance [35]. This flexible application of symbolic gestures enabled students to interpret roles more authentically and foster greater cohesion in portraying relationships between characters. These findings align with Mead's symbolic interactionism, which emphasizes the critical role of nonverbal symbols in cross-cultural communication.

Another key outcome of the program was the enhancement of students' confidence and collaboration skills. As the training progressed, they became more self-assured in navigating multicultural environments and displayed stronger teamwork capabilities. In line with the peer-feedback strategies advocated by Tualalelei and Halse [3], the integration of structured group discussions and mutual evaluation exercises reinforced collaborative learning and mutual responsiveness during performance. Their ability to engage actively with peers from different cultural backgrounds reflected both improved performance skills and heightened cultural adaptability [28].

From a theoretical perspective, this study not only reinforces existing intercultural drama theories but also extends their practical applications. The cultural symbol negotiation described by Pavis and the "ethics of hybridity" proposed by Gilbert and Lo [8] were vividly manifested in the training process. Students demonstrated their ability to adjust and adapt symbolic actions, preserving the cultural authenticity of these gestures while ensuring their relevance in a multicultural context. This dynamic adjustment highlights the practical value of stylized performance training in bridging cultural divides.

Practically, the course design proved highly adaptive and scalable. The integration of classroom observations and ongoing student feedback allowed instructors to tailor the curriculum to meet the participants' evolving needs, thereby enhancing the program's effectiveness. In the future, incorporating additional practical components, such as international workshops or public performances, could further enrich students' cross-cultural experiences and creativity. Such initiatives would not only elevate students' performance skills but also contribute to the broader development of multicultural theatre education.

Furthermore, the dynamic feedback mechanism and phased training approach employed in this study also offer insights into other key issues. First, in cross-cultural performance, the individualized adjustments tailored to diverse cultural backgrounds, along with the practice of emotional symbolization, not only help performers overcome cultural differences and achieve emotional resonance but also lay the foundation for developing a curriculum that balances multicultural characteristics with the enhancement of performance skills. This integrated training model demonstrates the inherent interconnection between the progressive development of performance techniques, emotional expression, and cultural understanding across different phases, thereby providing both theoretical and practical support for the design of a multicultural theatre curriculum. Future research may further explore the applicability of this training model in a broader range of cross-cultural contexts, offering a more comprehensive answer to how specific strategies can optimize cross-cultural performance and curriculum design.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive exploration of the effectiveness and applicability of stylized performance training in cross-cultural theatre education. The findings indicate significant improvements in participants' emotional expression and adaptability in symbolic actions, enabling them to naturally convey emotions through these movements in cross-cultural contexts. The dynamic feedback mechanism allowed for continuous adjustments to the training content, ensuring the curriculum met the diverse needs of students from different cultural backgrounds and thereby enhancing their performance abilities and cultural sensitivity.

Despite the positive outcomes, this study has several limitations. One key limitation is the relatively small sample size, which constrains the generalizability of the findings. A larger participant pool would allow for more robust conclusions and broader applicability. The short timeframe of the study, limited to a single semester, also restricts understanding of long-term impacts. While students demonstrated significant progress during the project, further research should explore how these skills evolve over extended periods.

Additionally, the cultural background of participants was relatively homogeneous, limiting the exploration of diverse cultural perspectives. Including participants from a wider range of cultural backgrounds could provide richer insights into how different cultural norms shape cross-cultural performance learning.

Future research should address these limitations by expanding sample sizes and increasing cultural diversity among participants. Longitudinal studies could examine the lasting effects of cross-cultural theatre training, offering a deeper understanding of how such programs influence artistic and intercultural development over time. Moreover, further exploration into the adaptation of cultural symbols across diverse cultural contexts would provide valuable theoretical and practical insights for cross-cultural theatre education.

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C : Conceptualization

M : Methodology

So : Software

Va : Validation

Fo : Formal analysis

I : Investigation

R : Resources

D : Data Curation

O : Writing - Original Draft

E : Writing - Review & Editing

Vi : Visualization

Su : Supervision

P : Project administration

Fu : Funding acquisition

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Authors state no conflict of interest.

## DATA AVAILABILITY

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in FigShare at <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.27626757.v1>, reference number 27626757.

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